

SS. Sergius & Herman
Russain Orthodox Churches, Old Church
English Bay
Kenai Peninsula Borough
Alaska

HABS No. AK-91-A

HABS
AK
9-ENGB
1A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SS. SERGIUS AND HERMAN RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCHES, OLD CHURCH HABS No. AK-91-A

Location: English Bay, Kenai Peninsula Borough, Alaska.

Present Owner: Alaska Diocese, Orthodox Church in America.

Present Occupant/
Use: Vacant.

Significance: A number of Russian Orthodox churches survive in Alaska, built by Native congregations in traditional forms. Perhaps one of the older Russian Orthodox churches in Alaska, the church at English Bay was not conceived as a whole, but appears to be composed of two previously used buildings. The icons have been moved to a new church, erected beside the old.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: In the 1890s, the Alaska Commercial Company sold a building to the community to use as a church. Payment was two sea otter pelts.¹
2. Original plans and construction: The original church was a rectangle, 15'-6" x 24'-4" on the exterior. On the interior, the eastern third was occupied by the sanctuary. The entire ceiling of the nave in the western two-thirds is devoted to an octagonal dome.
3. Alterations and additions: The western 14' of the church was added, as is marked on the exterior by a break in materials. The addition, dating from the 1930s, is also a reused building.

B. Previous Churches on the Site:

The church was founded by John Moonin, a creole born at Fort Ross, California, in 1821, and his wife, Helen, who came to English Bay in the 1860s.² The first church building, constructed in 1870, was destroyed by fire in 1890. No record of its appearance survives. An 1895 church account noted that it was built in 1872 "of planks," meaning wood-framed, "with an altar, an iconostas, and space for 100 persons."³

¹McClintock Land Survey and Planning Company, "English Bay," map/poster prepared for Kenai Peninsula Borough, June 1989.

²Nancy Yaw Davis, "English Bay: History and Continuity" (paper prepared for Alaska Legal Services, September 1987), 7.

³"Concerning the Orthodox Mission in America," October 14, 1895, translated by Sister Victoria, Orthodox Alaska 6 (January 1977): 42.

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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: A plain and pasted-together building, the church has an octagonal-domed ceiling on the interior, marked by a small cupola on the exterior. With the icons removed, however, the building has lost much of its visual interest.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The rectangular building measures 15'-5" x 38'-4".
2. Foundations: Wood post.
3. Walls: Clapboards, with some horizontal planks on the west front. There is a noticeable break in materials on the sides. The building is painted white with royal blue trim.
4. Structural system: Wood frame.
5. Stoop: Thick planks outside the door.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There is a single, vertical-plank door, in front of another door, with five panels.
 - b. Windows: Six-over-six-light sash windows in the nave and sanctuary (original building), and six-light windows in the west portion of the nave (addition).
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Gable roof, covered with green asphalt.
 - b. Cupola: A small square cupola, with no lights, rises from the roof of the nave. It is covered with wood shingles on the sides and roof. Its pyramidal roof supports a cross.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The nave is one open space, with two columns (4-3/4" x 5") supporting

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an arch at the end of the original building. Behind the iconostas is the sanctuary, on the east end. There is no vestibule.

2. Stairways: There is a one-step amvon.
3. Flooring: The nave floor is covered with wall-to-wall carpeting, while the sanctuary has linoleum.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The east (original) part of the nave has horizontal-plank walls. Also covered with planks is the ceiling, where an irregular octagon slants toward a flat square center. The west end of the nave has walls covered with oil cloth and a flat ceiling. The sanctuary walls are covered with oil cloth, and there is a flat plank ceiling.
5. Decorative features: Although the icons have been removed, the iconostas still stands. Its end bays are angled back toward the sanctuary. Its wood frame is covered with oil cloth on both sides. The royal doors have a round-arched doorway and the deacons doors are flat-arched.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The church sits on a bluff on the edge of town, overlooking the airstrip on low land. The village was previously located on the low land, but moved up after the 1964 earthquake. The church faces west, with its altar on the east, as is traditional among Russian Orthodox churches.
2. Historic landscape design: There are graves on the south and east sides of the church.
3. New church: Ten yards to the north, a new church was constructed in 1981. It was designed by Vincent Kvasnikoff, the council president and village chief, and built by the villagers. The church is rectangular, measuring 27'-3" x 34'-9" on the interior, with a semi-octagonal apse on the east end and a 9'-4" x 7'-8" vestibule on the west end. The wood-framed building is covered with T1-11 siding, and has an asphalt-covered gable roof. The casement windows have a single sash.

Despite its different proportions, the new church has several characteristics that are reminiscent of the old one. There is an irregular octagonal recess in the ceiling, rising to a square ceiling, and not lit by windows. The iconostas slants back at each edge. The icons were removed from the old church, and include one dated 1884.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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"Concerning the Orthodox Mission in America," October 14, 1895, translated by Sister Victoria, Orthodox Alaska 6 (January 1977): 36-46.

Davis, Nancy Yaw. "English Bay: History and Continuity." Paper prepared for Alaska Legal Services, September 1987.

McClintock Land Survey and Planning Company. "English Bay." Map/poster prepared for Kenai Peninsula Borough, June 1989.

Wallace, Fern A. The Flame of the Candle. Chilliwack, B.C.: SS. Kyril and Methody Society, 1974. Plate 137 is a view of the front of the old church, with the bells set on a stand to the left of the door. Plate 138 is an interior view.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of SS. Sergius and Herman Russian Orthodox Church was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a division of the National Park Service, the state of Alaska, and the Icon Preservation Task Force. The project was executed under the general direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, and Boyd Evison, Alaska Regional Director, National Park Service. Recording was carried out during summer 1990 by Steven M. Peterson, project director; Jet Lowe, photographer; and Alison K. Hoagland, historian, who prepared this report.